



Alaska State Archives
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Title: Guide to the Probate Records of Alaska, 1885-1960

Creator: U.S. Commissioners, Alaska District Courts

Collection summary: This index represents approximately 17,000 probate cases administered in the district court system which served Alaska from 1884 until the Alaska State Court system was established in 1960.

Organizational history: From 1879 until 1884 the Alaska territory operated under a rudimentary judicial structure. The Organic Act of 1884, created the District of Alaska under the Dept. of the Interior served by district courts and U.S. Commissioners. Commissioners served as both justices of the peace and probate judges. One U.S. Commissioner served the entire District from Sitka in 1884; by the time of statehood there were four district courts and approximately sixty commissioners. The first probate court took place in 1885. Approximately 25,000 more cases were heard by the district courts before a state court system was established in 1960.

Collection description: Cases include estates, guardianship of minors, adoptions, search and rescue, sanity hearings. Files may contain estate inventories, burial expense accounts, notices and claims of creditors, proofs of heirs, wills, oaths, bonds, missing persons inquiries, coroner's inquests, testimony and affidavits, accounts of administrators. Many records were destroyed by fire, natural disaster or neglect prior to statehood and so the Archives do not have all probate records.

Extent: 16,985 case files or dockets in various record groups and series.

Arrangement: The index is arranged alphabetically and includes last and first name, case number if available, precinct, type of case, date, whether docket or a case file, and the location of either or both if available.

Restrictions on access: Adoption records are confidential under AS 40.25.120(a)(1) and researchers must submit a notarized letter to the appropriate Alaska Court System Deputy Clerk stating the title, year, and file number of the case file; the exact documents in the file s/he requires; and, the reason for the request. The probate Clerk will review the request and forward to the Judge for a determination.

Juvenile records are confidential under AS 40.25.120(a) (2) and Article 1, Section 22, *Alaska Constitution*.

Court or medical documents that have been sealed by the Court require a court order from the respective court before the records may be released.

Preferred Citation: Probate Case Files, Alaska State Archives, Juneau, Alaska.

Related Materials: Some territorial case files may be filed with other institutions in Alaska. Inquire at the Probate Office of the Alaska Court System, Anchorage or the National Archives and Records Administration, Anchorage. The Archives has received a few additional probate cases since this index was created.

Custodial history: The Alaska State Court system received custody of the Commissioners' records and subsequently transferred them to the Alaska State Archives.